



NDC Conference Report

Research Division - NATO Defense College

No. 03/15 – May 2015

NATO and New Ways of Warfare: Defeating Hybrid Threats

29 – 30 April, 2015 NATO Defense College, Rome

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“True genius resides in the capacity for evaluation of uncertain, hazardous and conflicting information.”

(Winston Spencer Churchill)

Core Messages: A Full Spectrum NATO for Full Spectrum Threats

“NATO and the New Ways of Warfare: Defeating Hybrid Threats” explored four main themes: NATO’s changing strategic environment, the scope and nature of hybrid threats; NATO’s pol-mil responses to hybrid warfare; and NATO’s military response to hybrid warfare. Defined as the denial of – and defection from – standard norms and principles of international relations in pursuit of narrow interests, hybrid warfare in today’s world is strategic in its ambition and employs a mix of disinformation, destabilising gambits and intimidation to force an adversary to comply with those interests. The essential purpose of hybrid warfare is to keep an adversary politically, militarily and societally off-balance.

Whilst much of the debate concerned the military aspects of hybrid warfare the need for a tight pol-mil relationship was seen as the essential pre-requisite for effective Allied engagement in facing the threats posed. Indeed, a fundamental issue under debate was how to create devolved political command authority in the early phase of a crisis to ensure that military high readiness is matched by the exercise of political agility in response to hybrid threats. Critically, whilst the debate centred on the threats posed by Russia to NATO Strategic Direction East, and by ISIL to NATO Strategic Direction South, such threats and risks were seen as reflective of a more conflictual world in which power is shifting at a rapid pace away from the Western liberal states.

Hybrid warfare exploits political seams within the Alliance and societal seams within open societies. Therefore, if NATO is to successfully adapt and adjust strategy, capability and resiliency it is vital that such threats are defined and properly understood and that early indicators are established thereafter; this is because effective conventional and nuclear deterrence remains the first order principle of Alliance action and high readiness (and high responsiveness).

Should deterrence fail, however, NATO must have the capacity and capability to fight war. That in turn entails the strengthening of societal cohesion within NATO nations, with the forging of close links between the civilian and military aspects of security and defence. The future NATO must be built on good intelligence, knowledge, robust command and control, as well as rapid response allied to the capacity to “surge to mass” via a “big, agile reserve”.

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Policy Recommendations

NATO's policy response to strategic hybrid warfare will in effect require reflection on, and adaptation of, the 2010 NATO Strategic Concept in light of the lessons of hybrid warfare. Effective strategic communications (Stratcom) will be vital both for home audiences and for the strategic key leader engagement implicit in strategic hybrid warfare. Such an adaptation and the strategic realignment of the Alliance thus implied would in effect reflect a mid-term (five-year) policy review of the Strategic Concept for accuracy, credibility and contemporary relevance, given the challenges posed by hybrid warfare. Such realignment would need to incorporate the following elements:

Prevention

Better understand strategic hybrid threats: NATO must establish a proper distinction between, and granulated understanding of, the threats posed to the Alliance from Strategic Direction East and Strategic Direction South.

Craft a hybrid warfare strategy: As part of NATO's strategic realignment, a NATO hybrid warfare strategy should then be considered and prepared by the Military Committee.

Establish adapted early indicators: Adapted early indicators must be established to enable more agile response to hybrid threats, especially in the early phase of the conflict cycle. This will require a new relationship between closed and open source information and better exploitation of the Alliance of knowledge communities.

Establish a Stratcom policy: Effective strategic communications is part of Alliance defence against hybrid warfare and effective messaging is central to strategic communications. A NATO Stratcom policy should be crafted to counter the narrative at the heart of an adversary's conduct of hybrid warfare. Particular emphasis should be placed on NATO-EU synergy and tight joint messaging thereafter.

Adaptation

Reconsider information management: To defeat hybrid warfare, NATO must beat the adversary to the message. That will require reconsideration of the use of classified information, a move to ensure the early release of mission-critical information, and the relationship between classified and unclassified information.

Adapt nuclear posture: NATO's nuclear deterrence posture, readiness and messaging also need to be reconsidered in response to Moscow's heightened use of nuclear weapons as part of hybrid warfare. The Alliance message must be clear: Moscow must be under no illusion. The Alliance still understands the role of nuclear weapons in deterrence and Russia will never achieve escalation dominance. Deterrence will thus be enhanced by a heightened role for the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) and a demonstration that, since the end of the Cold War, NATO has lost neither the knowledge nor understanding of the role of nuclear weapons in deterrence.

Close the conventional/nuclear seam: NATO's military preparedness and readiness will also need to include exercising and training for the transition from conventional operations to nuclear operations. Specifically, NATO must respond to Russia's stated military doctrine that seeks to use nuclear weapons to "de-escalate crises" in Moscow's favour.

Adapt exercising and training: Allied Command Transformation (ACT) must be clearly tasked to develop exercise and training programmes reflecting recent developments in, and reactions to, hybrid warfare. Specifically, NATO needs to make far better use of lessons identified and lessons learned from recent campaigns and incorporate them in a "scientific" development programme in which the future force(s) is/are built via a series of linked exercises and defence education initiatives that test the unknown rather than confirm the already known. The two joint force commands and the high readiness force headquarters would

have a key role to play in the development of such a programme.

Reconsider the role of Partners: A specific study is needed on the role of Partners in a NATO hybrid warfare strategy. Such a study would re-consider partnership mechanisms in light of hybrid warfare, such as the Mediterranean Dialogue, Istanbul Co-operation Initiative, Partners across the Globe and Partnership for Peace.

Enhance Resiliency: A NATO hybrid warfare strategy would need to properly consider how best to enhance the resiliency of Allies and Partners. A particular focus would be needed on the protection of critical national information and infrastructures and consequence management. A useful first step could be an analysis of key vulnerabilities to better understand how individual NATO nations could be undermined by hybrid warfare. Such an analysis would include a better understanding of the following points: how minorities are susceptible to manipulation; the vulnerability of the media space to external saturation; how the lack of a binding national narrative could be exploited; and how electorates could be alienated from leadership during a hybrid warfare-inspired crisis, particularly through elite corruption.

Engagement

Enhance military responsiveness and agility: Hybrid warfare seeks to exploit the seams between collective defence, crisis management and co-operative security. Therefore, twenty-first century Alliance collective defence will also require a mix of coalitions and Alliance-wide action. The capacity for the rapid force generation of coalitions of Allies and Partners, supported by effective command and control at short notice will be central to NATO's military responsiveness and agility.

Establish credible forward deterrence: In countering hybrid warfare forward, deterrence is as important as forward defence. Indeed, NATO must not be forced to trade space for time in the event of a full-scale war of which hybrid warfare is but a prelude. Critically, the Alliance needs to consider how best to put an adversary and its forces off balance, both politically and militarily; and NATO forces must aim to force an adversary onto the defensive, via a counter-hybrid warfare strategy that imposes the unexpected on decision-makers. Such a posture will require demonstrable reassurance and readiness.

Reconceive NATO forces: In support of forward deterrence, combined and "deep joint" Alliance forces must be able to operate effectively in and across the seven domains of strategic hybrid warfare – air, sea, land, space, cyber, information and knowledge. Critically, the military relationship between NATO's first responder forces and heavier, follow-on forces (many of which may be deployed outside Europe) will need to be worked up.

Implement Wales in full: The September 2014 NATO Wales Summit was a benchmark summit, much like London in 1991 and Washington in 1999, and the priorities identified must be implemented in full. Therefore, NATO political guidance must establish credible capability requirements for twenty-first century collective defence, in such a way as to generate a new kind of "defence" through a mix of advanced deployable forces, cyber-defence and missile defence. Strategic hybrid warfare is not simply an alternative form of warfare; it is the new way of warfare.

Summary

"A strategic understanding is needed of what we are facing: critical instability."

Unless remedial action is taken over the next decade there is a risk that a fundamental shift in the balance of power will take place away from NATO's liberal powers towards illiberal powers, both state and non-state. Therefore, hybrid warfare must not simply be seen as the strategy for weaker, illiberal powers to offset the military superiority of NATO and its members, but as a generic form of warfare by which illiberal power

seeks to paralyse the policy and action of liberal states by attacking their open societies. The aim of hybrid warfare is to weaken social cohesion and thus, with it, the capacity of democratic governments to undertake either pre-emptive or punitive action.

Russia and ISIL: The two case studies explored – Russia and ISIL – show similarities but are also essentially distinct. Any counter-strategies would thus need a critical understanding of the nature of each adversary, recognising their motivations and structures, so as both to deter and to employ counter-strategies. It is also vital that NATO controls the necessarily long escalation ladder which hybrid warfare implies. However, given the nature of the adversaries such a granulated, graduated response would require a new relationship between information, knowledge, understanding, influence, and effect. Critically, closed and open source information would need to be far more nimbly exploited to identify “patterns of behaviour” and to provide sensitive early warning, with indicators able to identify and discern hybrid warfare in its early stages.

Russia’s specific “war aims”: Moscow aims to consolidate gains in Ukraine and re-establish a Russian “sphere of influence”. Therefore, Russia’s use of hybrid warfare is both strategic and ambitious; it involves and incorporates a planned mix of soft and hard power elements, as part of a “pre-conceived and multi-layered campaign” designed to achieve Moscow’s strategic ends. These elements include the use of conventional military force (including use of unmarked Special Forces), intimidation by the threatened use of nuclear forces that “casts a nuclear shadow” over Europe, employment of cyber to disrupt and destabilise Alliance societies, use of economic levers to undermine the political cohesion of NATO (and EU) states and institutions, and massive propaganda and disinformation conveyed through strategic communications and distorted public diplomacy. Russia is attempting an unprecedented, strategic application of hybrid warfare. Maskirovka (deception) has been part of Russian military doctrine since the 1930s. However, what was once an operational/battlefield technique has now become a tool of grand strategy involving the entire Russian state from President Putin down, as Moscow seeks to impose a “corrosive shadow” over Europe.

Hybrid warfare and fundamentalism: ISIL seeks to use both soft and hard power to sow fear in populations, across both the Middle East and Europe, in its effort to create a Caliphate. ISIL is “a sectarian social parasite” which exploits the crisis in state institutions in the region, and the seams within NATO nations that can be identified with some elements of the Muslim community, and which could prevent a coherent response to the threat ISIL poses while further undermining the Middle East state structures.

1. NATO’s Changing Strategic Environment

“NATO is facing the unknown, unknowns on a daily, monthly and yearly basis.”

NATO must prepare for the unexpected

Secretary General Stoltenberg has warned that the Alliance must be constantly preparing for the unexpected. The challenges posed by NATO’s role and responsibilities, the fractured nature of contemporary geopolitics which spawns hybrid threats, and the potential for unwanted surprise and shock underpinned much of the conference debate. The threats posed by Russia to NATO Strategic Direction East (NATO’s eastern flank), and by ISIL to NATO Strategic Direction South (NATO’s southern flank), framed the debate. Discussion centred on the need to ensure that Article 5 collective defence remains valid in the face of hybrid threats that exploit the seams between collective defence, crisis management and cooperative security.

Twenty-first century NATO exists in a dynamic strategic environment, in which the capacity to “reduce one’s opponent can be accomplished by means other than military confrontation”. Hybrid warfare in its latest form thus seeks to exploit strategic ambiguity through a blend of soft and hard power, reinforced by the (threatened) use of nuclear and conventional forces, with the aim of keeping an adversary politically, militarily, and even societally off balance. Consequently, hybrid warfare is conducted along six lines of

operation and employs all dimensions of state and non-state actors with elements of state-like power: the use of conventional military force (including use of unmarked Special Forces); intimidation by the threatened use of nuclear forces; employment of cyber to disrupt and destabilise; use of economic levers to undermine the political cohesion of states and institutions; and massive propaganda and disinformation campaigns, through strategic communications and a twisted form of “public diplomacy”.

The essential elements of hybrid warfare

The essential elements of hybrid warfare have been revealed by Russia in Ukraine and by ISIL across northern Syria and Iraq. “Hybridity” thus combines political pressure and propaganda, allied to the sustained and directed use of proxies and an extended use of psyops. Additionally, both Russia and ISIL have employed “information confrontation” in very different, yet nevertheless effective ways. Russia has used corrupted media, such as RT and Sputnik, as vehicles to sow disinformation and to challenge Western perspectives. ISIL has exploited the Internet and social media to target growing and often disaffected minority Muslim communities in Western societies, not simply to recruit fighters, but to deter governments from taking action. Both strategies have proven more effective than the majority of NATO allies are prepared to admit.

Therefore, an effective Alliance counter-hybrid warfare strategy will be necessary. It must be built on the following tenets: political solidarity, political agility and credible, tailored military power. The threat posed by hybrid warfare is compounded by the shifting balance of military power. By 2020 the US could be spending “only” some \$420bn per annum on defence. At the same time the US will be under growing pressure to remain strong the world over, particularly in East Asia. Critically, NATO could be called upon to be an effective political and military first responder in and around Europe, “which is a rough neighbourhood” in the face of growing hybrid threats. Although France has committed to a modest increase in defence expenditure, many Allies are continuing to cut their defence budgets, with the UK likely to cut its defence budget by a further 8% after the May 2015 elections.

“The threat posed from the south is acute; the threat from the east is existential.” Given the nature of the threats posed by both Russia and ISIL, it would be just as easy to say that in NATO’s rapidly changing strategic environment the threat posed from the south is potentially no less existential than that posed to NATO’s east. Indeed, whilst the threat posed by Russia could be said to be more immediate, the threat posed by a collapsed Syria and ISIL is a “bleeding wound” and will likely endure far longer. Therefore, NATO must move to establish consistency of strategic response to the challenges posed by both Russia and ISIL.

2. The Scope and Nature of Hybrid Threats

“In the twenty-first century we have seen the tendency toward blurring the lines between states of war and states of peace. Wars are no longer declared, and having begun, proceed according to an unfamiliar template.”

(General Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff, Russian Armed Forces)

Hybrid warfare: old and new

Hybrid warfare has been around in many guises over the centuries. However, strategic hybrid warfare is new even if today, “there is no ambiguity about the ambiguous threat NATO faces”. The debate focused on the extent to which NATO and its nations properly understand the reasons for and aims of Russia’s actions and the ISIL phenomenon. A fear was expressed that Russia is “holding all the cards” and that crises along NATO’s eastern flank could emerge very quickly. NATO’s eastern and southern flanks both offer challenges of scale, but are very different by nature. Taken together, both sets of threats demand a “strategic

comprehensive answer”.

Russia

Russia today is a revisionist power that combines a potent mix of strength and fragility with a determination to regain the strategic initiative by whatever means at its disposal. Moscow’s aim is manifold but can be summarised as retribution for perceived slights, and the generation of respect/fear through the forced imposition of a new sphere of influence. However, Russia’s use of hybrid warfare is first and foremost the preservation of the current regime in light of the profound economic and societal challenges Russia faces. The focus of contemporary Russian policy and strategy is Europe, in which Moscow aims to shape the strategic agenda rather than respond to it. This aim reflects an abiding Russian concern that both NATO and EU enlargement were anti-Russian acts. In effect, President Putin, driven by a host of domestic and external calculations, is seeking to overturn the post-Cold War political settlement to which NATO was central, and which most Europeans have come to believe is legitimate, balanced and just.

Russia’s strategy is based simply on the age-old “verity” of Realpolitik – “power must as power will”. Whatever the institutional arrangements agreed since the end of the Cold War, and whatever the institutional affiliations and memberships of states on Russia’s western borders, Russia seeks their forced reorientation towards Moscow and its interests. Consequently, Russia is endeavouring to “limit the freedom of manoeuvre of immediate neighbours”. It is also seeking to “set the conditions” for what is happening in other parts of Europe and exploit a “string of frozen conflicts” all over Europe, so as to open new political seams of instability. Therefore, in confronting Putin the Alliance needs first and foremost to demonstrate robust political solidarity because “what is not going to deter is half-measures”.

Russia’s use of hybrid warfare is reinforced by its nuclear and conventional forces, both of which are being modernised apace, and both of which are being used to intimidate and/or coerce, as evident from operations in Ukraine. However, Moscow’s use of coercion and intimidation extends beyond Ukraine to NATO allies. “Russia has shown it can move significant forces over remarkable distances to its western border over a very short timeframe, to undertake large-scale snap exercises on the borders of NATO.”

ISIL

NATO will need to be strategically nimble in dealing with the threat to its southern flank. Indeed, whilst Russia is a state actor operating in a geographical space that sees hybrid warfare as part of an “escalation chain”, ISIL is a religiously inspired jihadist group that emerged from within Al Qaeda, albeit reinforced by remnants of the Iraqi Sunni/Baathist Army that sees instability as an end in itself. However, with only 30-35,000 hard core fighters ISIL affords NATO a “very narrow attack surface” and, as such, represents a “de-centralised mode of international warfare”, precisely because it is so hard to define.

ISIL is a “sectarian social parasite” and a function of an “organic institutional crisis that seeks to offer an alternative to the failed state system – the Caliphate”. ISIL also appeals to the “youth crisis”, as 60% of Arabs are under the age of thirty. Consequently, “not only must the ISIL surge be stopped, it must be rolled back”, to prevent a direct threat to Europe. In parallel with “AQ Central”, ISIL is exploiting social media, with 1400 people reading ISIL propaganda at any one time. Two thirds of foreign fighters are in Syria, which is the ISIL centre of gravity.

However, ISIL is also a consequence of the “broken politics of the Middle East”. Indeed, ISIL is, at one and the same time, “terrorist group, government, criminal mafia, humanitarian organisation, recruitment agency and conventional military force”. The major weakness of ISIL is its extremism upon which all the anti-ISIL forces must capitalise, both in the region and beyond.

There can be no accommodation with ISIL. In the first instance, ISIL must be contained and confronted by military force. However, most of the challenges on NATO’s southern flank are by nature social, political

and economic, rather than military. ISIL must ultimately be defeated in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Indeed, ISIL's demise will only be achieved "by rebuilding states in the region" so that they are seen once again as representative of its peoples, and justice and aspiration are served. Whilst Russia poses a direct threat to NATO, combatting ISIL must be pursued by "instrumentalising regional allies". Therefore, the Alliance must seek to be an effective partner to the UN, African Union, Arab League, Gulf Cooperation Council, and key regional states such as Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

Strategic hybrid warfare

Russia and ISIL together emphasise the strategic nature of contemporary hybrid warfare and the need to "grip the sheer scale of change". They both reinforce the need for the Alliance collectively to "think about security in its broadest sense". What is new is the level of ambition implicit in Russia's – and ISIL's – application of hybrid warfare, and its incorporation into two very different but nevertheless "grand" strategies. Therefore, NATO and its nations must have the necessary ambition and imagination to counter the threats – both from Russia and ISIL.

The very scope and nature of hybrid threats means that "new surprises and unknown unknowns" are doubtless coming "down the track". Furthermore, the Alliance must at the same time consider a range of other threats posed by Iran and weak states on NATO's borders, such as Libya. If NATO is to meet those threats the Alliance will need political robustness reinforced by knowledge and agility, associated with military capability and capacity. Resiliency, redundancy and robustness will be the three essential pillars upon which measured, decisive responses will rest. An effective counter-hybrid warfare strategy would thus depend on a "fundamental change of mind-set and culture". Above all, it would require of NATO and its Allies and Partners "structures and skills to respond to such surprises".

NATO's new security and defence continuum

If the Alliance is to successfully confront the threats to its south and east NATO cannot afford to "choose one set of issues over another". In effect, collective defence and crisis management are part of the same insecurity continuum and must be seen as equal, not distinct. As with all crises, the solutions will be ultimately political. The Alliance must thus seek to "improve relations with both its south and east to re-establish trust". Critically, the Alliance needs a "comprehensive approach" to the challenges and threats posed by the eastern and southern flanks. However, the military tool will – and must – underpin the political and diplomatic dimensions of NATO security and defence. Indeed, each and every one of the Alliance's responses to the threat posed by strategic hybrid warfare demands the maintenance of NATO's military edge.

3. NATO's Pol-Mil Response to Hybrid Warfare

"I skate to where the puck is going to be."

(Wayne Gretsky)

NATO's strategic realignment

Hybrid warfare operates at the seams between government and society, soft and hard power and political and military command. Strategic realignment will thus be critical to the unity of effort and purpose that is the essential bulwark against hybrid threats. Such realignment will require manifold actions but first and foremost the establishment of "a permanent structural adaptation to changing operational environments".

Fail, and hybrid warfare will force the Alliance permanently onto the political and military back-foot and leave Allies and Partners “waiting for the next surprise”.

A theme running throughout the conference was the need for an effective Alliance counter-hybrid warfare strategy that matches political and military agility. In other words, “political decision-making must not take longer than it takes to move forces”. Moreover, “when we take action does it address the threat or does it make us feel good?” Critically, “NATO must adapt its capabilities to its adversaries and not expect adversaries to adapt to NATO.”

There was some debate as to the need for devolved command authority. However, given the principles of solidarity and political consensus at the core of the Alliance political ethos, ensuring political and military agility could prove elusive. Therefore, NATO commanders are unlikely to receive political instructions and guidance as fast as they would like, unless an Article 5 contingency is triggered. Moreover, combating hybrid warfare will need far more joined-upness in government. For example, there seems little linkage between strategic pronouncements on the dangers posed by hybrid warfare, defence spending, and the strictures imposed by finance ministries which see the only “strategic” matters of note as being fiscal propriety and debt reduction.

Redefining full spectrum warfare

Hybrid warfare has re-defined the meaning of “full spectrum warfare”. Twenty-first century full spectrum influence and effect must – and will – demand political coherence, deterrence, defence and resiliency, both of systems and society. Indeed, effective consequence management will be as important as deterrence and defence. Therefore, NATO Allies and Partners must seek to reduce their vulnerabilities to such threats. Such a defence would include a mix of preparedness, deterrence, defence and responsiveness. Elements in this mix would include enhanced cyber-defence and the defeat of corruption that could enable adversaries to disaggregate NATO’s political structures, given the centrality of consensus to Alliance decision-making.

Calling a lie a lie

In the first instance NATO must become far more adept at confronting the strategic communications both Russia and ISIL use to keep NATO societies off balance. That starts by establishing an effective “counter-narrative which calls a lie a lie”. Thereafter the fashioning of an effective counter-strategy is required that combines diplomatic, informational, economic and military tools (DIME). NATO and the Allies will also need to become far more adept at “offensive stratcom” that tells people the truth. To that end, NATO needs to become far more adept at information management, so as to “beat the enemy to the message”. A first step would be for the Alliance to switch to a policy in which “everything is unclassified, unless we agree it is classified”.

Adapting NATO’s nuclear posture

Russia has also very consciously introduced a nuclear dimension to hybrid warfare that the Alliance must counter. Indeed, the shift in Russian military strategy to the implied first use of nuclear weapons in a warfighting capacity is part of the messaging Moscow is using to intimidate NATO Allies and Partners, and thus prevent a coherent pol-mil response. Therefore, the Alliance must also adapt its nuclear posture as part of a new deterrent strategy that embraces five elements: “say what you mean” via a clear declaratory policy that projects the will of the Alliance; prevent nuclear blackmail, to preserve freedom of manoeuvre; reaffirm the Alliance nuclear posture as strictly defensive; use clearly visible nuclear systems as part of messaging; and re-establish Alliance deterrence on both credible nuclear and conventional components. Specifically, NATO’s nuclear deterrence posture, readiness and messaging also need to be reconsidered in response to Moscow’s heightened use of nuclear posture and messaging as part of hybrid warfare. Moscow must be

under no illusion: the Alliance still understands the role of nuclear weapons in deterrence, and Russia will never achieve the escalation dominance it seeks by the implied use of nuclear weapons. Therefore, as part of the messaging the Alliance will need to demonstrate, via a heightened role for the Nuclear Planning Group, that since the end of the Cold War NATO has lost neither knowledge nor understanding of the role of nuclear weapons in deterrence.

Take a broad pol-mil view

It is critical that the pol-mil challenge posed by hybrid warfare is met early in the conflict cycle. Therefore, the Alliance will need at the very least a counter-hybrid warfare strategy that includes “a list of indicators built on good intelligence, reinforced by agile decision-making and forces at high-readiness and ready to go”. However, the realisation of such a strategy will require a profound “cultural change”, within and across the Alliance.

An effective working relationship with the EU will also be vital as part of an effective Alliance counter-strategy, not least because the EU is central to effective economic security and, where necessary, critical to the imposition of economic sanctions. Specifically, a working and robust information exchange between the EU and NATO will be vital to an early warning system which makes the most of the networks both institutions have in place. The EU is developing resiliency in parallel with NATO in the fields of energy and climate security, with financial security reinforced by an Information Strategy. The enhanced sharing of classified information between NATO and the EU would also strengthen the counter-hybrid warfare strategies of both institutions.

ISIL poses a very different set of challenges to Russia, and much of the effort to blunt ISIL must start at home. It is estimated that some 5,000 foreign fighters have travelled to Syria to fight with ISIL. That flow must be stopped. Prisons across Europe have been used to recruit converts to Islamism, which can and must be prevented. Funding flows from pro-jihadi groups in Western societies also need to be blocked.

An effective counter-narrative strategy will be vital. To that end, NATO and its nations must attempt to penetrate the “closed Russian media space” and “disrupt” ISIL messaging. The centrality of the “battle of the narratives” to hybrid warfare also places a responsibility on individual Allies that generate much of NATO’s intelligence, to develop together a concept of “information defence” that includes the early release of imagery.

4. NATO’s Military Response to Hybrid Warfare

“Strength matters. Speed matters. Decision-making speed is vital.
Readiness enables speed, but readiness and speed cost money.”

Strategy, capability, capacity and affordability

Hybrid warfare seeks to exploit the seams between collective defence, crisis management and cooperative security. Therefore, twenty-first century Alliance collective defence will also require a mix of coalitions and Alliance-wide action. The debate focused on NATO’s full-spectrum military response to threats against NATO Strategic Direction East and NATO Strategic Direction South, and on how best to balance strategy, military capability, military capacity and affordability. The key military question the Alliance must confront in facing hybrid warfare is how best to get enough Allies in place, in time to deter aggression. To be credible, deterring hybrid warfare requires far more than a “correlation of forces”. It demands a NATO demonstrably able to generate the necessary forces, resources and experienced people to create an effective

“team” that can match and better an adversary at every point across the hybrid warfare spectrum. To that end, an effective military response to hybrid warfare will demand a mix of forward deterrence, collective defence and resilience, as well as the ability to project force rapidly, all of which in turn will demand agile political command and control, and rapid force generation, more often than not as part of NATO or NATO-led coalitions.

The modernisation of Article 5

The Readiness Action Plan (RAP) and the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) agreed at the September 2014 NATO Wales Summit must be seen as part of the wider modernisation of Article 5 collective defence, and thus a step on the road to a new twenty-first century concept of “defence”. Such a defence would necessarily incorporate advanced deployable forces at high readiness, with sufficient numbers of reserve forces to enable Alliance forces to surge if needs be, allied to cyber and missile defence.

The capacity for the rapid force generation of coalitions of Allies and Partners, supported by effective command and control at short notice, will be central to NATO’s military responsiveness and agility. Allied forces will also need to operate across the seven domains of strategic hybrid warfare (air, sea, land, space, cyber, information and knowledge), as the battle space, security space and information space merge. The debate also focused on the need to balance manoeuvre and mass, implicit in the VJTF and in a renovated NATO Response Force (NRF), as well as the follow-on forces which will prove vital if NATO’s first responder role is to be credible as both a deterrent and a defence.

The need is pressing. President Putin ordered a complete review of the performance of the Russian armed forces following the 2008 invasion of Georgia. The 2010 Modernisation Programmes, allied to the 2012 and 2014 reviews of Russian military strategy, confirmed the switch to a strategic form of hybrid warfare as the central strategic and tactical doctrine of the Russian armed forces. The new “doctrine” combines high-level political deception with theatre and tactical use of military and non-military means to achieve Moscow’s ends. This forging of a new strategic balance between ends, ways and means can best be described as *Strategic Maskirovka*. Specifically, Russia’s military modernisation is focused on improved air superiority, enhanced intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, rapid mobility, precision strike and strengthened command and control.

NATO’s military response

NATO’s military response has thus far been measured with the various air, land and maritime force packages agreed at the September 2014 NATO Wales Summit, helping to drive adaptation:

Air: NATO’s air responsiveness has been good. The Readiness Action Plan has reinforced reassurance measures to combat Russian hybrid warfare in the Baltic States, and is helping to drive the military adaptation of the Alliance. The VJTF is also reinforcing adaptation. The Joint Force Air Component (JFAC) was stood up early, the generation of early indicators and early warning has been strengthened by enhanced intelligence systems, and the Alliance is moving towards a Joint Operations Area over European air space.

Land: NATO Landcom is based in Izmir, Turkey and, as such, sits at the fulcrum between NATO Strategic Direction East and NATO Strategic Direction South. NATO’s land responsiveness is being reinforced by a series of exercises that focus on “major joint operations plus”. Indeed, in 2014 Landcom led a major Article 5 exercise. Landcom is also acting as the “functional and operational nexus helping the evolution of Alliance forces for the future”, by considering the best possible structure for the future force. The Alliance can already stand up a force of three corps, or some 150,000 soldiers.

Maritime: The Readiness Action Plan is already “blunting the Russian challenge”. NATO’s collective joint power, allied to the nuclear deterrent, “places an upper limit on hybrid ambition”, “Russia’s Navy is already over-matched by NATO”, the Alliance can protect sea lines of communication, and the sea can be denied to

Russia. The maritime component also plays a powerful role in messaging. Maritime task forces send a rapid and powerful deterrent response message to adversaries, that is “targeted, focused” and flexible.

Challenges: The major military challenge posed by Moscow would be Russia’s use of anti-access/area-denial measures, to prevent/hamper entry by the Alliance into the Baltic Sea and Black Sea. This threat places a particular need for tight Alliance air, sea and land operations. For example, a fully-equipped Standing Naval Group in conjunction with the air and land components could not only contest and contain Russian operations, but also project significant power into the land environment. However, all of these components will need to be worked up and, whilst in 2005 NATO had four fully-resourced Standing Naval Forces, that is not the case today.

Next steps: If the VJTF and the NRF are to be credible as forward deterrent forces and first responders, they must be worked up and exercised with the follow-on forces. Indeed, given the opportunistic nature of hybrid warfare, the source and scale of follow-on forces remains of concern to NATO commanders. The NATO Wales Summit began to address such challenges and the consequences of the unexpected, such as a US engaged simultaneously in major crises in the Asia-Pacific region and Europe, or if the Russian and ISIL challenges in effect merge into one large crisis.

Emphasise Alliance strengths

Equally, the Alliance has other strengths that reinforce the military response and which must be exploited as a defence against hybrid threats. These include the Alliance’s populations, the quality of its armed forces and the legitimacy of its mission. However, if the Alliance is to galvanise those strengths, particularly in the military domain, it is critically vital that decision-making in crisis is agile because “speed matters”. Indeed, if the VJTF and NRF can be inserted early into a crisis then they could deter or contain a crisis. However, a “VJTF deployment that is late will surely have to fight”.

“Readiness also matters because readiness enables speed.” However, maintaining significant forces at high readiness “costs money”. Therefore, planning matters because it enables speed and, in hybrid warfare, it is vital that military and non-military efforts are integrated. Above all, “strength matters” and, whilst the VJTF and NRF are designed to move quickly, deter, fight and win, they are not in themselves sufficient.

Three NATO military principles

NATO’s military response to hybrid warfare should thus be based on three principles: first response to hybrid warfare must come from the nation threatened; unity of effort will be vital in confronting both the Russian and the ISIL challenge, and will involve “team-mates from across the security community”; and, whilst a credible military posture will also be vital, it is important not to over-militarise the response.

Conclusion: Full-Spectrum NATO for Full-Spectrum Threats

“Remaining idle is not an option.”

To prevail in hybrid warfare, NATO must return to the fundamental principles of how democracies fight wars. That entails the strengthening of societal cohesion in NATO nations, and the forging of close links between the civilian and military aspects of security and defence. Such a defence must be built on good intelligence, knowledge, robust command and control, and rapid response allied to the capacity to “surge to mass” via a “big, agile reserve”. Central to Alliance hybrid warfare will be a renovated deterrence posture, affirming that aggression will “impose an unacceptable cost on an adversary”.

It is also important to confront each threat in detail, with “tools that are tailored and adaptable”, via an Alliance that is able to generate broad and deep knowledge if the fundamental assumptions upon which Alliance action is taken are to be sound. Implicit in the threats posed by both Russia and ISIL is the possibility of simultaneous and multiple crises that could stretch the Alliance to the limit, and possibly beyond, if NATO is unable to provide a full-spectrum defence built on the capabilities and capacities outlined in the NATO Wales Summit Declaration.

The key assumption for NATO Strategic Direction East must be a firm understanding of what Russia is seeking to achieve, in the belief that a mix of firm engagement, deterrence and a clearly communicated will to defend the Alliance and its peoples will demonstrate to Moscow that the costs of aggression far outweigh any possible benefits. Then, and only then, will a political settlement that restores stability to all of Europe’s borders be possible, and Russia once again take its rightful place in the community of secure European nations.

The key assumption for NATO Strategic Direction South must be a firm understanding that military power, whilst important, is not sufficient to prevail, and that the Alliance’s role would be to offer support to Partners in the region. Unlike Russia, ISIL has no place in the future political shape of either Europe or the Middle East.

Critically, both political and military responses must be equally agile and that will require a NATO that can “think the unthinkable”. Such responses must be, first and foremost, driven by the need to understand the nature and scope of the challenges the Alliance will face in the twenty-first century. That means placing strategy above politics: political reality first, the constraints of political bureaucracy second.

Specifically, a NATO strategic counter-hybrid warfare strategy would have six elements, based on the lessons learned from over twenty years of engaging complexity and uncertainty:

1. The maintenance of political cohesion and a proper understanding of the role of force in the wider political engagement.
2. The establishment of NATO at the core of a matrix of stabilising institutions – UN, EU, African Union, Arab League, etc.
3. The sharpening of intelligence and early warning, based on enhanced mutual understanding, improved communications and properly established foundations for rapid political decision-making.
4. The considered adaptation of NATO to face and engage in future conflict. NATO must not simply endeavour to fight the last war better.
5. The planning and consistent, scientific implementation of a full spectrum of exercises, in support of full-spectrum operations.
6. Enhancement of the flexibility, agility and responsiveness of Alliance forces, through preparedness and readiness

Professor Sir Michael Howard said that for armed forces, “the last twenty yards are always the same”. NATO’s *ultima ratio* mission is military in nature, and the influence and effect which will be vital if hybrid threats are to be deterred, contained, blunted and defeated demand credible Alliance military force. However, NATO’s purpose for existing is ultimately political; for this to succeed, a credible military Alliance cannot exist to effect without a credible political Alliance. NATO’s bottom line is precisely this: “the world today is no safer than it was in the twentieth century. War is possible. Indeed, big war is possible. We in NATO form part of a community that can, and must, prevent that from happening.”



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